

CASE STUDIES IN TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH

ANGELA CHIOSEA¹

Abstract

The article deals with the problem of using active methods of teaching on the example of case study. The notion of active methods of teaching, the description of case study and the stages of preparing case studies are given in the paper. The article contains a case study on business English. It presents realistic, complex, and contextually rich situation and often involve a dilemma, conflict, or problem that one or more of the characters in the case must negotiate. The peculiarity of active methods of teaching is that it develops practical and critical thinking. This helps the students not only to memorize and render the material which was given by the teacher but involves them in the process of active thinking and practice. Case studies give students practice identifying the parameters of a problem, recognizing and articulating positions, evaluating courses of action, and arguing different points of view.

Key words: Action maze, ESP

JEL CLASSIFICATION: A21, A22, A23.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article aims to present how to develop the learners' natural spark of curiosity and eagerness to learn into creativity. As an ESP teacher in courses to students of business and commerce, I have found the answer to this riddle in the application of the case method, which is in my opinion, a stimulating and useful way of facing the challenge. In the present paper, I will focus on the case study method and its application in language teaching. I will point out to the possibility of combining a case study and a role-play. Case study is focused on the development of the individual's cognitive capacity, their ability to learn and master the system of knowledge, creativity of the individual. Therefore, in these conditions it is necessary to find the most effective ways to improve the curriculum, identify new methods and techniques of teaching, technologies that will enable the teacher to achieve this goal in the most efficient way. One of these methods is the case-study method.

2. WHAT IS A GOOD CASE STUDY?

The majority of students, studying for a degree in economics and management are probably familiar with the method of case studies. For others, case study is something not very clear. At the same time, the case method is increasingly used not only as a teaching method, but also as a method of staff selection.

Case studies are scenarios that apply the concepts learned in the classroom in the “real life” situation. Usually they are presented in narrative form and often include problem solving and discussion by groups of students, or the whole class. Business case studies begin with the description of a company profile followed by additional information presented in the form of charts, graphs and tables. Students are faced with real world tasks and given the authority to decide how to solve business problems using the target language they have already acquired at Business English classes and knowledge of subject areas gained in special courses. It is a useful task-based activity representing the student centered approach. Think about the traditional teacher centered method, in which the instructor is the hub and all communication goes through him or her. Learning a language and communication skills requires active participation. If only one student can speak at a time, how much learning can be accomplished? With the case study method, on the other hand, students are allowed to communicate in their individual groups, thereby multiplying the opportunities to produce language and to be corrected, as well as to practice communication skills [Rodgers, 2006]

It provides an opportunity

¹ Lector Universitar, MD-2005, Republica Moldova, mun. Chisinau, str. Mitropolit Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, 61. Academia de Studii Economice a Moldovei, Tel: (+373 22) 224128. E-mail: angela_chiosea@yahoo.com, web site: www.ase.md

- to practice a variety of business topics relating to Human Resources, Management, Marketing, Finance
- to practice and develop language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing,
- to practice and develop a variety of business communication skills relating to agreeing and disagreeing, checking and clarifying, discussing advantages and disadvantages, justifying proposals and reaching agreement, chairing and participating in meetings, negotiating a contract, giving a presentation, etc.,
- to develop analytical, managerial skills such as team working, decision making, problem solving as well as critical thinking and reflective learning,
- to develop linguistic competence by consolidating already acquired and being introduced to new lexis,
- to develop writing competence by taking the minutes , writing the agenda of the meeting and as a follow-up activity writing a letter, memorandum, a report, an e-mail, etc.,
- to develop students’ organizational skills and encourage collaborative learning.

As a rule, the case studies are more effective when they are presented sequentially, so that students receive additional information depending on the situation unfold, and can continue to analyse or criticise the situation or the problem.

According to Professor Paul Lawrence, a good case study is “the vehicle by which a chunk of reality is brought into the classroom to be worked over by the class and the instructor. A good case keeps the class discussion grounded upon some of the stubborn facts that must be faced in real life situations”. [Lawrence, 2010]

In business context, a case study is defined as “a description of a particular problem or decision facing company managers”. As suggested by Malcolm Nair of the Harvard Business School, a good case study is similar to a detective story: one who wishes to find a solution has to put together bits and pieces of knowledge. However, in contrast to the detective story, there is no ultimate solution – no single correct answer to the rider. The basic part of the case study is a case report or case summary. It is written the description of the situation often supported with the factual quantitative information arranged in tables or charts. Its length varies from several lines to tens of pages.

3. THE USE OF CASE STUDIES TO DEVELOP BUSINESS COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The teacher should pre-teach the language required to discuss the case study. It is important to select the skill you would like to focus on and teach the specific language. If we take meetings as an example, we could provide students with useful language input for both the chairperson and the participants, such as the language of agreeing and disagreeing, hedging, expressing opinions, checking understanding, interrupting, referring back, reaching agreement, finding a compromise, coming to a consensus, making your point, making recommendations, inviting people to speak, opening and closing the meeting, etc. If we take negotiations as an example, we could pre-teach the language of putting forward a proposal, agreeing and disagreeing with a proposal, imposing conditions, making concessions, asking for clarification, summarising what has been said, postponing a decision or playing for time, concluding a deal, etc. After finding a solution to the problem the students make presentations in groups. Students should be familiarised with presentation skills, such as introducing the talk, indicating the structure and sequences of your talk, moving from one section of your talk to another, highlighting, summarising, inviting questions, etc. Business English materials (Cotton D., Falvey D. & Kent S. New Edition Market Leader. Pre-Intermediate Business English Course Book)., which have structured the lexical approach to business skills have been successfully used in the Business English classroom for practicing and developing students’ communication skills. If students hold a press conference, the teacher should pre-teach the skills of asking and answering difficult questions, using various intonations ranging from neutral and/or polite to forceful and/or aggressive [Cotton et al., 2011a]

4. ADVANTAGES OF THE CASE STUDY METHOD

There is a wide range of educational challenges and opportunities of the case-study method:

- acquisition of new knowledge and development of general ideas;
- development of students' self-critical and strategic thinking, the ability to listen to and consider the alternative views, express their points of view;
- development of skills which are necessary for the analysis of complex and unstructured problems;
- development of common sense, responsibility for the decision-making process, the ability to communicate;
- skills development activities and their implementation;
- the ability to work in a team;
- the ability to find the most efficient solution to the problem.

The advantages of the method of case-study include:

- use of the principles of problem-based training – development of the real problems-solving skills, the ability to work in a single group of the problem field;
- development of team-building skills;
- development of skills of simple generalization;
- development of presentation skills;
- development of skills of press-conference, the ability to formulate a question, reason a response.

The method of case study is a tool to apply the theoretical knowledge to solve practical problems. The method promotes students' critical thinking, the ability to listen to and consider an alternative point of view to express their arguments. With the help of this method, students have the opportunity to demonstrate and improve the analytical and evaluative skills, learn to work as a team to find the most efficient solution to the problem.

Being an interactive teaching method, the case-study method is gaining students' positive attitude, ensuring the development of theoretical and practical use of the material. It effects the professionalization of students, promotes their maturation, and generates interest and positive motivation towards learning. Simultaneously, the case-study method serves as a teacher's way of thinking, their particular paradigm, which helps to think and work in a different way updating their creativity.

The case-study method is most widely used in teaching economics, management science, and business abroad. The case-study method is considered to be one of the "advanced" active teaching methods.

The case-study method requires readiness of students, availability of their independent work skills; lack of students training, poor motivation may lead to a superficial discussion of the case.

5. VARIETIES OF THE CASE STUDY METHOD

The Harvard Method. It originated as early as at the end of the 19th century at the Harvard Law School as *a non-directive way of teaching*. Its aim was and has remained to date to show students *how to learn by independent thinking*. The role of teacher/instructor is that of the facilitator. The teacher does not cover a topic by “telling” learners facts and ideas (as it is done in the lecture method). Instead, learners are left to discover ideas by themselves. Another feature of the Harvard School Method is its *completeness*. Instructors, authors of case reports, spend months or even years in the field before writing case reports that are detailed and time-consuming to study and analyse.

Incident process. In the variety of case study method referred to as the incident process. Learners receive insufficient amount of data needed to solve a case. All the information that may be required is with the instructor who reveals it only after the learners have asked appropriate

questions. The purpose is to learn how to ask the kind of questions that lead to the information needed.

Action maze is a specialized form of a case study. Learners – participants of the maze – study a printed case with some solutions offered. They select the options they think is the best. After this, the instructor hands out printed explanations of the consequences of the solutions chosen. Students give a feedback on the consequences in a written form.

6. APPLICATION OF THE CASE STUDY METHOD IN TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH

In the following part of my presentation, I would like to describe the way I use the case study method in my ESP classes at the Academy of economic studies of Moldova. The Application of the method consists of the following stages:

1. **Lead-in**
2. **Case analysis**
3. **Identifying the problem**
4. **Suggesting solutions**
5. **Assessing the solutions suggested**
6. **Selecting the best options**
7. **Follow-up tasks**

1. Lead-in

Brainstorm the problems that office managers have to deal with.

Small group work. Fill in the empty spaces with your own words.

<p>interpersonal relationship</p> <p>discipline grapevine</p> <p>..... OFFICE</p> <p>performance remuneration</p> <p>.....</p>
--

Comment on each item and explain how is connected with the other problem listed. The case may be introduced in various ways:

- ✓ Reading/surfing the internet about leadership styles
- ✓ Introducing the topics with a statement
- ✓ Telling a personal story
- ✓ Referring to learners' own experience in managing people.

2. Case Analysis

At the second stage, the case is analysed in terms of setting, characters and relationships among them.

Setting: accounts department of an advertising agency.

Characters: Paula – owner, Susie – promoted to a managerial position after working for the agency for three years: Karin and Eve – administrative workers, Susie's subordinates.

Two months after Susie's promotion, the situation is getting complicated: the agency fails to meet its objectives, numerous mistakes occur in invoicing. Susie's subordinates spend a lot of time whispering and not doing much work. Susie was taking a heavy briefcase home every evening –

obviously, she does of the work on her own. Paula decides to speak to Susie to discuss the problem with her.

Tasks:

- a. Summarise the case in five sentences. Do not draw any solutions.
- b. Describe the characters using six adjectives to describe Paula and Susie. Give your reason.
- c. What are their job accountabilities? How does each of them approach the problem?

3. Identifying the Problem

Task:

Discuss the following questions in small groups and present your findings to the class:
What has gone wrong? Why? Which of the characters is to blame for the situation?

4. Suggesting Solutions

Task:

How would you deal with the situations if you were Paula?

Consider the following options:

- Make radical changes (firing)?
- Tolerate the situation for a while to see what Susie will do next?
- Personally discuss the problem with everybody involved?
- Hold a meeting and deal with the situation there?
- Any other solutions?

5. Assessing Solutions

Learners are asked to assess each options suggested and list theirbpros and cons.

Task:

Do you that the solutions suggested would produce a desirable result? Would they be cost-effective?

6. Selecting the „Best” Option

Questions:

What do you think Paula should do now? How can she make sure that the situstion is improved?

7. Follow-up exercises

Although management training materials friquently refer to the case study method as one that is useful when „cold” look at real facts is needed, this method maybe effeciently used to develop language learners’ creative abilities and stimulate their imagination. This may to assume the roles of the case characters and enact the situation.

The role-playing case study may modified in various ways:

The reverse role play: participants are instructed to make wrong decisions, (the outcome of these decisions would be unfavarouble).

The „helicopter view” role play: there are three participants, two of them are role-playing while the third watches and steps into the play after a defined period of time.

Role-Play

You are Susie. You have decided to talk about the problem with your subordinates. Prepare your talk.

Student A You are Paula. You have decided to demote Susie and recruit a new supervisor. Tell her about your decision.

Student B You are Susie. You feel responsible but are still offended. Tell Paula you wish to leave the company.

Discussion of a related topic

Do you think a man would perform better in this situation or you believe women are stronger and better leaders than men? Do you believe that the world would be a much better place if women ran the show?

Research task:

Collect five advertisements in English offering management training suitable for Susie. Choose the best one for her.

CONCLUSION

In the present paper, I have attempted to illustrate how language teachers in ESP classes may adapt the method that enables them to create a meaningful context for teaching business concepts, and while doing so, encourage creative thinking in their learners. This case study method provides students with an excellent opportunity to apply creatively the language material based on their professional knowledge and allow students to adapt to real and potential situations. Being an interactive method of teaching, it won a positive attitude on the part of students who see it as an opportunity to take the initiative, to feel self-sufficiency in the development of theory and mastery of practical skills. It is also very important that the analysis of the situation has a strong impact on the professionalization of students, promotes their maturation, and generates interest and positive motivation to learn.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Cotton D., Falvey D. & Kent S. New Edition Market Leader. Pre-Intermediate Business English Course Book. (Sixth edition). Harlow, England: Pearson Longman. 2010
2. Cotton D., Falve D. & Kent S. Intermediate Market Leader. Business English Course Book. (Third edition). Harlow, England: Pearson Longman. 2010.
3. Cotton D., Falvey D. & Kent S. Upper-Intermediate Market Leader. Business English Course Book. (Third edition). Harlow, England: Pearson Longman. 2011.
4. Cotton D., Falvey D. & Kent S. Advanced Market Leader. Business English Course Book. (Third edition). Harlow, England: Pearson Longman. 2011.
5. Paul R. Lawrence. Driven to lead: Good, Bad, and Misguided Leadership. Washington Post, 2010 (ISBN: 9780470623848)
6. Rodgers, D. (2006). Business Communications. International Case Studies in English. (sixth edition). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.